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Subject: WRAL: NC regulators grant key permit for natural gas pipeline

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By Matthew Burns, WRAL.com senior producer/politics editor

RALEIGH, N.C. — State regulators on Friday gave the go-ahead for a \$5 billion natural gas pipeline to be built in eight North Carolina counties.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which will be owned and operated by Duke Energy and Dominion Energy, will carry natural gas more than 600 miles from West Virginia to southeastern North Carolina, ending in Robeson County.

The Department of Environmental Quality issued the key water-quality permit for the project after an "exhaustive eight-month review" that included public hearings in Fayetteville and Rocky Mount and five requests for more information from the utilities.

"DEQ left no stone unturned," Secretary Michael Regan said in a statement. "Our job doesn't end with the granting of the permit but continues as we hold the company accountable to live up to its commitments. Our efforts have resulted in a carefully crafted permit that includes increased environmental protections, while giving us the tools we need to continue close oversight of this project as it moves forward."

About a dozen people held a sit-in at DEQ offices in downtown Raleigh on Friday to protest the decision.

About 20 minutes after the permit was announced, the Governor's Office issued a news release about the Fund for Clean Energy and Rural Development and noting that Duke, Dominion and other pipeline partners will put a combined \$57.8 million into the fund. The money will go toward environmental mitigation initiatives, such as expanding renewable energy sources, and to ensure local communities have access to natural gas from the pipeline.

"Preserving clean water and the integrity of the communities where this pipeline is constructed will be a priority," Cooper said in a statement. "I have asked our environmental regulators at DEQ to hold this project accountable and to continue to insist on clean water, effective sedimentation control and high air quality along the path of the construction. At the same time, I am continuing to push for more renewable energy, especially solar and wind."

DEQ put the following conditions on the water permit:

- Restored streams and wetlands must be monitored for at least three years with photo documentation.
- All stream-crossing construction activities, unless a specific site is exempted, must be conducted using best practices to divert water and limit potential sediment pollution in streams.
- A horizontal-directional drill must be used to cross the Neuse River to protect the river and its riparian buffers.
- The composition and properties of drilling fluids and additives for each horizontal-directional drilling crossing must be submitted to DEQ and will be available online for public access.
- Private well testing will be required before and after construction within 150 feet of the disturbed area or 500 feet from blasting areas. Testing after impacts must be conducted by an independent qualified groundwater specialist.

- DEQ water resources and erosion control staff will conduct monthly onsite inspections of pipeline construction activities.
- The project will obtain coverage of and meet the requirements of the state's construction stormwater permit for the entire construction corridor in North Carolina.

The pipeline still needs an air-quality permit from DEQ for a compressor station in Northampton County, stormwater permits Nash and Cumberland counties and approval of the erosion and sediment control plan for the northern segment of the pipeline's North Carolina route, as well as a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for stream and wetland impacts.

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